

Congressman Ron Kind
Floor Statement
Water Resources Development Act – HR 2864
June 14, 2005

MR. SPEAKER, I RISE IN SUPPORT OF THIS BILL WHICH, AMONG
OTHER THINGS, AUTHORIZES THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS'
SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

THE NAVIGATION AND ECOYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY IN TITLE VIII
OF THE BILL IS THE PRODUCT OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER-ILLINOIS
WATERWAY SYSTEM NAVIGATION FEASIBILITY STUDY, WHICH HAS HAD,
UNFORTUNATELY, A LONG AND CONTROVERSIAL HISTORY.

AS MANY WILL REMEMBER, A RESPECTED ARMY CORPS ECONOMIST FILED A WHISTLEBLOWER COMPLAINT ABOUT THE CORPS' USE OF FAULTY DATA TO JUSTIFY LOCK AND DAM EXPANSION. PARTLY IN RESPONSE TO THAT INCIDENT, I INTRODUCED LEGISLATION TO REVAMP THE PROJECT REVIEW AND AUTHORIZATION PROCEDURES AT THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS. THE GOALS OF MY BILL WERE TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY; ENSURE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY; BALANCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERESTS; AND ALLOW GREATER STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN PROPOSED PROJECTS.

MANY ELEMENTS OF MY REFORM MEASURES ARE IN THIS BILL, THOUGH NOT TO THE DEGREE I BELIEVE IS STILL NEEDED. FOR EXAMPLE, I BELIEVE THE CORPS' OUTDATED PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES SHOULD BE UPDATED TO REFLECT CURRENT LAWS AND PUBLIC VALUES, AND MUCH MORE SHOULD BE DONE TO STRENGTHEN THE PEER REVIEW PROVISIONS – SECTION 2030 – TO CREATE A TRULY INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE REVIEW PROCESS. IT IS MY HOPE THE OTHER BODY WILL INCLUDE THE FULL SCOPE OF THESE SENSIBLE REFORM MEASURES IN THEIR VERSION OF THIS IMPORTANT BILL.

IN ADDITION, IN THE WAKE OF THE WHISTLEBLOWER SCANDAL, MY COLLEAGUES AND I IN THE ARMY CORPS REFORM CAUCUS CALLED FOR THE SCIENTIFIC, NONPARTISAN, NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL TO REVIEW THE CORPS' FINAL RECOMMENDED PLAN. REGRETTABLY THE NRC'S REPORT CONCLUDED THERE REMAINED SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CORPS' COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC PREDICTIONS ON THE MISSISSIPPI - BUT EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE CORPS' INCLUSION OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION COMPONENTS IN THEIR PLAN.

WHILE I AM REMAIN TROUBLED BY THE CORPS' INABILITY TO FULLY JUSTIFY THE MODEL THEY USED FOR THEIR COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC PREDICTIONS, AMERICA CLEARLY HAS AN AGING LOCK AND DAM INFRASTRUCTURE ON THE MISSISSIPPI. MOST OF THE LOCKS AND DAMS ON THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER SYSTEM ARE OVER 60 YEARS OLD AND MANY ARE IN SERIOUS NEED OF REPAIR AND REHABILITATION. FOR THE PAST 19 YEARS, THE CORPS HAS BEEN UNDERTAKING MAJOR REHABILITATION OF INDIVIDUAL FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE NAVIGATION SYSTEM IN AN EFFORT TO EXTEND THEIR USEFUL LIFE. THIS WORK IS CRITICAL TO ENSURING NAVIGATION RELIABILITY AND SAFETY.

FURTHERMORE, I REPRESENT A RURAL DISTRICT WHERE AGRICULTURE PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE ECONOMY AND THE LIFE OF MANY OF ITS CITIZENS. UPDATING THIS VITAL WATER TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM BY MODERNIZING THESE AGING LOCKS WILL MEAN GREATER EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR FARMERS, AND WILL CREATE AND SUSTAIN JOBS THROUGHOUT RURAL AMERICA WHICH HAS BEEN HIT HARD BY THE SLUGGISH ECONOMY.

FINALLY, THE ECOLOGICAL HEALTH OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE TO THE MANY PEOPLE THAT MAKE THEIR LIVING OR SEEK THEIR RECREATION IS BASED ON A HEALTHY RIVER SYSTEM. SCIENTISTS STUDYING THE RIVER AGREE THAT WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT EFFORTS TO RESTORE HABITAT, THIS VITAL NATIONAL RESOURCE WILL CONTINUE TO DECLINE. A STRONG AND CONSISTENT FEDERAL ROLE FOR ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION IS NECESSARY FOR THE ENTIRE BASIN, BOTH BECAUSE OF THE LARGE ACREAGE OF FEDERAL LANDS, INCLUDING THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE AND FISH REFUGE (THE LONGEST RIVER REFUGE IN THE CONTINENTAL U.S), AS WELL AS ITS MAJOR IMPORTANCE AS A CONTINENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL FLYWAY FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS, AND AS A HABITAT FOR FEDERALLY LISTED THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES.

WE MUST ENSURE FEDERAL RESOURCES ARE BALANCED BETWEEN LOCK CONSTRUCTION AND ECOSYSTEM NEEDS. THAT IS WHY I OFFERED AN AMENDMENT TO THIS BILL THAT SEEKS TO DO TWO THINGS: FIRST, IT ADDS A NEW PROVISION REQUIRING THE SECRETARY TO MAKE AN ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS SPECIFICALLY ON WHETHER THE LOCK AND DAM CONSTRUCTION AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECTS ARE BEING CARRIED OUT AT COMPARABLE RATES. IN ADDITION, THE AMENDMENT MAKES IT CLEAR THAT CONGRESS INTENDS TO SHARE THE AUTHORITY WITH THE SECRETARY IN DETERMINING IF THE PROJECTS ARE MOVING FORWARD AT A COMPARABLE RATE AND ADJUST THE ANNUAL FUNDING ACCORDINGLY. MISSISSIPPI LOCK AND DAM MODERNIZATION AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION ARE AN EXPENSIVE PROVISION OF THIS BILL AND THE AMERICAN TAXPAYER DESERVES TO KNOW IT IS BEING DONE RIGHT.

MR. SPEAKER, THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER IS ONE OF AMERICA'S NATIONAL TREASURES. PEOPLE COME FROM ALL OVER THE U.S., AND ALL OVER THE WORLD COME TO ITS BANKS TO SEE THE NATURAL SPLENDOR CAPTURED SO WELL BY AUTHORS LIKE MARK TWAIN.

AS FOUNDER AND CO-CHAIR OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER CONGRESSIONAL TASK FORCE, I HAVE LONG SOUGHT TO PRESERVE THE RIVER'S HEALTH AND HISTORICAL MULTIPLE USES, INCLUDING AS A NATURAL WATERWAY AND A HOME TO WILDLIFE, FOR THE BENEFIT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS OF AMERICANS. WHILE THIS IS NOT A PERFECT BILL, IF IMPLEMENTED APPROPRIATELY, I BELIEVE IT WILL BENEFIT BOTH RURAL ECONOMIES AND THE WILDLIFE THAT DEPEND ON A HEALTHY MISSISSIPPI RIVER.